

GANDHI AND THE SIKHS

BY

GURMIT SINGH
ADVOCATE

PUBLISHERS:
USHA INSTITUTE OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
SIRSA (HISSAR)

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AUTHOR OF
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Islam & Sikhism
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To

AMRITA * My Wife

&

SIMMI * My daughter

PREFACE

There are three types of great men:—

- (i) Those who are born great.
- (ii) Those who become great by their qualities.
- (iii) Those who are made great by circumstances.

Gandhi ji was a great msn of his time but to what category of great men he belonged, only objective historians will tell. One thing is however certain, that is, that he was not inerrant.

He was a deeply religious man and like an average human being was proud of his faith i.e.. Hinduism. Secondly, he was a man of below average ability in his early life, as a student and as a lawyer. Therefore, when suddenly he found himself at the top among the Indian leaders, he developed a sense of vanity. Therefore, sometime has said certain things which were disrespectful to the founders of other faiths.

Although, he was always proclaiming that there is no distinction between Hindus and Sikhs, yet his own conduct did not reflect his sincerity in this belief. He called Guru Gobind Singh, a misguided patriot. He was even hesitant to refer to Sikh Gurus as ‘Gurus’ and generally called Guru Nanak as “Baba Nanak.”

Sikhs were not the only victims of his ire. He was equally disrespectful to Jesus Christ. He wrote:—

“If Jesus was like God, or God Himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself...I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born. His death on the Cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it, my heart could not accept.”

(Message of Jesus Christ — Page 12)

A successful and shrewd politician, as he was, his language is often well guarded and even sugar coated but the intelligent reader will not fail to notice his (Gandhi ji's) bias against the followers of other religions.

By writing the present book, I do not mean to show any disrespect to Gandhi ji. This is evident, from the fact that I have throughout referred to him as ‘Gandhi ji.’ I have extensively quoted from his speeches and writings so that whatever is written by me is corroborated by his own words.

This is only a spade work and I lay no claim to any originality or research. All the chapters of this book were published in the various issues of the Sikh Youth Calcutta. I express my deep sense of gratitude to all the eminent writers (List given at the end of this book) whose language I

have frequently borrowed and from whose works have derived abundant assistance in writing this book.

I am indebted to S. Kapur Singh, M.L.A. (Punjab), formerly I.C.S. and also member of Parliament, for writing the foreword to this book.

I am also thankful to Shri O.P. Khosla, senior lecturer in English, National College, Sirsa, for reading the manuscript of this book and making many valuable suggestions.

I am also thankful to my younger brother Surinder Singh M.A., M.B.A. and my eldest sister Mrs. Savitri Randhawa. M.A. (Econ; Major Psychology); M.Ed. for checking up the proofs.

The book is primarily meant for the Sikh young men, who could not have known those facts as all the government resources are being employed to project Gandhi ji as champion of secularism.

GURMIT SINGH
Advocate

SIRSA
27th Sept., 1969.

FOREWORD

I have carefully read the script of this booklet “Gandhi and the Sikhs”. The Author has rendered service to the cause of a scientific and objective understanding of the predicament in which the Sikhs find themselves with their own country. For the last one hundred years or so, the Hindu revivalism has demanded of the Sikhs:

[a] A renunciation of their peculiar religious personality and political identity; and

[b] an undertaking never to aspire for participation in political power when it falls into the hands of the Hindus.

The material that the author has collected well marks out Mahatma Gandhi as the most audacious and out spoken Champion of this basic demand of non-Hinduism of the 20th Century in relation to the naive and helpless Sikhs.

KAPUR SINGH,
M.A. (Cantab): (Ex-I.C.S.)
M.L.A. (Punjab)
Ex-M.P.

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AMBEDKAR PLAN FOILED

Not many years ago, the U.S. Government honoured the memory of Mahatma Gandhi, by issuing a special postage stamp on his birthday and the inscription hailed him as a “Hindu National Leader”. Some Indian journalists protested against the use of word “Hindu” the purport of which was the denigration of the great Mahatma who, in their opinion, was an Indian National leader. Transgressing this controversy, it is common knowledge that Gandhi ji was a staunch Hindu in his beliefs and the ideals of Ahinsa and non-violence which formed the basis of his social and political philosophy were derived from and coloured with ancient Hindu thought. He looked at passing events from the Hindu point of view rather than as an Indian. An important example in this regard, for the Sikhs, is Gandhi’s attitude towards Dr. Ambedkar’s decision to renounce Hindu faith and to embrace Sikhism along with about five crore untouchables.

Originally, when the civilisation of Indo-Aryans was in the process of evolution in a land full of variety and a mass of sprawling humanity, the Hindu society was divided into four varnashrams, namely, Brahmins, the priest, teachers, intellectuals; Kshatriyas or the rulers and warriors; Vaishyas or merchants, traders, bankers etc; and Shudras, the agricultural workers and labourers. The story of the growth of the Varnas is too obvious to need any repetition.

In the beginning, the basis of varna was worth not birth but as time moved it changed its base und heredity began to play a more dominant role than the ability of an individual. By and large, an element of inflexibility gripped the Varna and in the process, the growth of civilisation was halted. As a result of the new rigidity, society got itself split into four major castes or the streams which were fed by numerous tributaries of unlimited sub-castes. The varna in its revised shape prohibited the Shudras from pursuing knowledge, from bearing arms and from engaging in economic enterprises, resulting in their reconciliation to eternal servitude as an inescapable fate. They (Shudras) had no privilege to move in the society of high caste Hindus. Se acute was the injustice done to them that even their entry into the temples, the places of worship, wee disallowed.

Gandhi ji too subscribed to the theory of caste by birth. He supported the ancient Hindu social order of Varna Dharma. He claimed that Varna of each individual is to be determined by birth rather than by his occupation.

“The meaning of Varna is incredibly simple. It simply means the following on the part of us all the hereditary and traditional calling of our fore-fathers, in so far as the traditional calling is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics, and this only for the purpose of earning one’s livelihood.Varna means predetermination of the Choice of man’s profession of his ancestors for earning his livelihood.....Varna, therefore, is a way, the law of heredity.....it does attach to birth. A man cannot change his Varna by choice. Not to abide by one’s Varna is to disregard the law of heredity. I believe that some people are born to teach and some to defend and some to engage in trade and agriculture and some to manual labour, so much so that these occupations become hereditary.”¹

Gandhi ji never dared to question the authority of the Hindu Shastras regarding untouchability. He rather upheld the authority of the Hindu Shastras in this regard. He writes:—

“I believe in Varnashram Dharma. But I eat with Bhangis. Let me tell you that in my own clan all the members do not inter-dine. In certain cases among our Vaishnav families they do not use each other’s utensils or even cook food on fire fetched from other’s kitchen. You may call this practice superstitious but I do not regard it as such. It certainly does no harm to Hinduism. In my Ashram, Dadabhai, one of the untouchable inmates dines with the rest without any distinction.

But I do not recommend any body outside the Ashram to follow this example. Again you know the esteem in which I hold Malviya ji. I would wash his feet but he would not take food touched by me.”²

Dr. Ambedkar declared that Gandhi had not the courage to take up the cudgels against the caste Hindus on behalf of the depressed classes. He observed that there was no difference between the law of Varna and Gandhi’s ideal prescribing pursuit of ancestral calling irrespective of natural aptitude. He felt that caste was the bane of Hindu society and it was not possible to eradicate this social evil because this notion of caste had been inculcated through the teachings of Hindu Shastras. He said:—

“Caste is a notion, a state of mind. Its destruction means a notional change. The Hindus observe caste not because they are inhuman and wrong headed. They observe caste because they are deeply religious. They are not wrong in observing castes. What is wrong is their religion which inculcates this notion of caste. The real enemy is the Shastras which teach them this religion of castes. Destroy this belief in the sanctity of the Shastras (scriptures). Destroy the authority, the sacredness and divinity of the Shastras and the Vedas. Make every man and woman free from the thralldom to the shastras and he or she will intermarry without your calling him or her to do so.”³

He therefore exhorted the untouchables to renounce Hinduism where they would perennially be reckoned an inferior religious or social sect. He planned the organization of conversions of the untouchables en masse. He told the untouchables; “You have nothing to lose, except your chains and everything to gain by changing your religion.”

After consulting his colleagues from different provinces in the matter of choosing the proper religion for conversion he decided to embrace Sikhism along with his followers. Giving his reasons for deciding in favour of Sikhism, Dr. Ambedkar observed:—

“If the depressed classes join Islam or Christianity they go out of Hindu culture. On the other hand if they become Sikhs they remain within the Hindu culture. What the consequences of conversion will be to the country as a whole is well-worth bearing in mind. Conversion to Islam or Christianity will denationalise the Depressed Classes. If they go over to Islam the number of Muslims would be doubled; and the danger of Muslim domination also becomes real. If they go over to Christianity, the numerical strength of Christians becomes five to six crores. It will help to strengthen the hold of Britain on the country. On the other hand, if they embrace Sikhism, they will not only not harm the destiny of the country but they will help the destiny of the country. They will not be denationalised. On the contrary, they will be a help in the political advancement of the country. Thus it is the interest of the country that the Depressed Classes, if they are to change their faith, should go over to Sikhism.”⁴

But Gandhi ji instead of approving and applauding these patriotic sentiments of Dr. Ambedkar condemned them as suicidal to the Hindus and held out a threat to the depressed classes through his trusted lieutenant Pandit Govind Vallabh Pant who declared that the Harijans could not have it both ways. Either they were Hindus and enjoyed the privileges under the Poona Pact or they ceased to be Hindus and forfeited them. Gandhi used Rajah, a political rival of Dr. Ambedkar, as a tool to frustrate Dr. Ambedkar's plan and induced him to start a counter move.

Gandhi also tried to persuade Dr. Ambedkar through his millionaire supporters Seth Wal Chand Hira Chand and Jamna Lal Bajaj to join Gandhi's camp by offering the allurements that he would have boundless resources at his disposal for the uplift of the depressed classes. Ambedkar told them frankly that he differed with Gandhi on many vital points. Upon this they referred to Nehru who in spite of his more sophisticated approach than that of Gandhi, had continued to follow Gandhi ji and they expected that Ambedkar could also toe the line. But Ambedkar silenced them by saying that he was not a man to be guided by the evil lights of Nehru and added that he could not sacrifice his conscience for success.

The plans about en masse conversion of untouchables to Sikhism had been privately disclosed to Mahatma Gandhi on strict understanding that all that would not be made public without consent. Mahatma Gandhi, however, committed breach of trust by going to press on his own. He angrily proclaimed:—

“It would be far better than crores of untouchables of India could be converted to Islam than that they should become Sikhs.”

Ambedkar who had sent a group of thirteen of his followers in September 1936 to Amritsar to form the vanguard to conversion movement had to abandon his plan in view of changed circumstances resulting from Gandhi's downright opposition.

1. Caravan Delhi — June 1969—Page II.
2. Indian National Daily Patna of 1-4-69, Page 4.
3. Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission by Dhananjay Keer Page 270.
4. The Times of India, 24 July, 1936.
5. Impact of Sikhism on Modern India, by S. Kapur Singh published in The Sikh Courier Great Britain in January, 1965 at page 4.

NON VIOLENCE

Hindus, being the majority community endowed with power have ever played with the Sikhs in a low key. With their ability to manipulate government machinery in the present context, attempts are being made in a systematised manner to sell the idea that Gandhi ji was the father of non-violence and non-cooperation and before him none had propagated or worked for these ideals.

Students of history who may have had the opportunity to look into confidential records of the British government in India have known than even before the birth of Mahatma Gandhi., Baba Ram Singh Namdhari, a spiritual revolutionary leader of the Sikhs, had non-cooperation and Swadeshi movement in Punjab against the British rulers in a bid to free India from the foreign yoke.

Gandhi's boycott of foreign goods, British services and courts was reminiscent of similar steps taken by Baba Ram Singh which as well included the boycott of British communication and transport services. Baba Ram Singh was non content with the side of negative side of non-cooperation only, he created parallel services — a government within a government. To a confidential circular issued by Central Police Lahore to the District Superintendents, dated 19th January 1867:—

“The Kukas or as they are some times called the Sant Khalsa have a private post of their own, which appears to be admirably organized. Confidential orders are circulated much in the Scottish bygone days. A Kuka, on the arrival at his village of another of the same sect with a dispatch, at once leaves off whatever work he may be engaged upon: if in the midst of a repast, not another mortal is eaten: he asks no questions, but taking the missive, starts off at a run and conveys it to the next relief or to its destination. Important communications are sent verbally and are not committed to writing. In carrying messages, they are said by Major Perkins to make great detours, to avoid the Grand Trunk Road. There can be little doubt that, though this machinery has been introduced to work a religious reform, yet in the hands of designing and unscrupulous men it can easily be made an engine of political danger. Reports have reached Major Perkins than the Kukas openly talk of being masters of the country, at some time when all the land will profess the new faith.”

British government felt nervous and began to watch his movements. They smelt sedition and exiled Baba Ram Singh out of India, while several of his followers were executed. Since the playing up of Ram Singh is apt to undermine the credit that is being given to his Gandhi ji, his followers who are in power want people to forget Baba Ram Singh, otherwise how do they explain their failure ho erect even a memorial to the first great revolutionary of India who fought to oust the British from this sacred land.

Gandhi ji's attitude towards the Sikhs was rather apathetic. He like some fanatics among the Hindus, refused to accept the separate entity of the Sikhs, their faith and mode of life, had emanated from the Hindus. Ha made no mature study of what constitutes Sikhism i.e. the faith, the scriptures and the lives of Gurus. In 1940, he wrote to Master Tara Singh, the veteran Sikh leader, that as the later put faith in the sword nothing in common with the Congress nor the

Congress with him. He believed that until the Sikhs abandoned their sword, which is a sacred symbol of the Sikhs, they were unfit for non-violent struggle. He went to the extent of calling Guru Gobind Singh a “misguided patriot”, because he had prescribed the sword as a sacred symbol. This caused considerable resentment among the Sikhs. Sardar Teja Singh making a reference to Gandhian hoax of fasting for self-purification wrote:—

“As for instance when he misreads the case of Sikhs and causes untold suffering to them by misinterpreting their history and scriptures, he does not purge his soul by keeping silent about them until he has studied their authentic history or the writings of Guru Gobind Singh and other Gurus. If instead of torturing his body he would take a course in Sikh scriptures, he would shed much of his intolerance towards Sikhs and perhaps towards other victims of his ire, too, and that would do him lot of spiritual good.”²

Gandhi ji wanted to pacify the Sikhs so he wrote in Young India dated October 1, 1925:—

“During my visit to Patna for A.I.C.C. Sardar Mangal Singh drew my attention to an article in ‘Young India’ entitled ‘My Friend The Revolutionary’ In the issue dated 9th April last. He told me that many friends were offended because they thought I had described Guru Gobind Singh as a misguided patriot, whereas I had glorified Krishna. The Sardar ji asked me to take in early opportunity of explaining what I meant by passages he drew my attention to. The careful reader will note that my language is most guarded. I have made no positive assertion. All that I have said is that believing every statement made about the heroes mentioned, including Guru Gobind Singh, to be true, had I lived as their contemporary I would have called every one of them a misguided patriot. But in the very next sentence, I have hastened to add that I must not judge them and that I disbelieve history as far as the details to the acts of the heroes are concerned. My belief about the Sikh Gurus is that they were all deeply religious teachers and reformers.”

The followers of Gandhi have not as yet shed their prejudices against the Sikhs. Sant Vinoba Bhave, chief disciple of Gandhi, recently ridiculed the practice of present day Sikhs wearing the Kirpan (sword) which he called an outdated weapon in view of the advanced armaments available now. He forgets that the wearing of Kirpan is an article of faith with the Sikhs and by making such remarks, he commits trespass into matters relating to the essential aspects of a religion. Although Vinoba Bhave has since apologised for his remarks, Sikhs should not forget the mentality which is behind it. If such Gandhian fellow travelers take the trouble of studying Sikh tenets, they will come to know that Sikhs cannot shed their Kirpan, because like the sacred thread of Hindus it is a sacred symbol of Sikhism and no Sikh can remain a Sikh if he repudiates the wearing of it. To ask him to give it up is to ask him to renounce his faith.

Sikhs too in non-violence but their concept differs materially from that of Gandhi. Guru Amar Das says:—

“Aap marai aura nah marai.”

i.e., “A man should rather kill himself than killing others.”

Sikh Guru’s suffered passively with a purpose. Theirs was an attempt to soften the consciousness of their oppressors with a view to making them to see reason. Guru Arjan Dev was

roasted alive and Guru Teg Bahadur was publicly beheaded. Neither commended his followers to put the enemies to sword.

In August 1922, during Guru ka Bagh struggle, which was meant to purify Sikh sanctuaries that had fallen into the hands of the guardians of ill repute, Sikhs set an example in non-violence. One thousand Sikhs settled near the sanctuary while 4000 Sikhs took up their abode in the Golden Temple at Amritsar ten miles away. Every day one hundred Sikhs from among the 4000, many of whom had served in the war, left the Golden temple after taking the vow of remaining true to the principles of non-violence in thought and deed and of reaching Guru Ka Bagh or being brought unconscious. Similarly, from the group of one thousand volunteers, twenty five took the same vow every day. Not far from the sanctuary the police waited at the bridge with iron-tipped rods to barricade their movement. With a wreath of white flowers around their black turbans the Sikh volunteers arrived every day before the police and at a short distance they stopped and began to pray silently. The police bent them with the iron-tipped rods, till blood began to flow and the brave Sikhs fell unconscious. It was a new heroism steeled by suffering, a war of the spirit.”

In the words of C.F. Andrews “A new heroism learnt through suffering has arisen in the land. A new lesson in moral warfare has been taught to the world. It reminded me of the shadow of the cross, the same passive suffering and the same calm holiness of the atmosphere.” Gandhi ji did not support the movement. He tried to give an impression that Sikhs were on the wrong side. He said:—

“They have poured their blood like water for the sake of a cause they hold as dear as life itself. They may have erred. If they have, it is they who have bled in the process.”³

When the British Government in 1923, made the young Maharaja of Nabha, Ripudaman Singh abdicate, in view of his softness for the Akali movement and forced him to leave his state under humiliating circumstances, the Sikhs held a Diwan (meeting) at Gurdawara Gursagar to protest against the forcible abdication of the Maharaja. When the religious diwan was being held “then the armed soldiers in uniform were taken into the Gurdawara itself, where the Sikhs sat listening to the Akhand Path. The whole congregation including the reciters and the attenders were arrested and, what was an unprecedented sacrilege, the Granthi actually reciting at the moment was caught hold of by his arms and dragged away and arrested. According to Sikh religion this was a great desecration. This interruption was admitted even by the Associated Press in a telegram published in the Tribune of September, 1923.”

The news of this desecration spread like wild fire and a number of Sikhs from the neighbourhood started coming to the Gurdwara to restart the Akhand Path. Government imposed restrictions on their visit to this Gurdawara and thus an agitation started.

On 29th September 1923, S.G.P.C. passed a resolution declaring:—

“The Sikh religious rights challenged by the Government of India are rights that can never be surrendered and the duty of maintaining dignity of the Sikh scriptures, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, is a duty that can never be shirked by the Sikhs. Therefore, S.G.P.C. solemnly declares its determination to fulfill the sacred duty of adopting all peaceful and legitimate means to maintain the dignity of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and to enjoy the unfettered exercise of the religious rights that have been challenged.”

The S.G.P.C. feels confident that with the mercy of God, the Path, will strictly adhere to the settled policy of non-violence, will keep united and faithfully follow the lines chalked out by the committee and keep up the struggle for God and Guru with vigour and determination by all peaceful and legitimate means, till complete religious liberty was established.”⁴

Gandhi ji instead of lending his full support to the Sikh movement looked upon it with suspicion and wrote to the S.G.P.C. for declaring:—

1. That the movement is neither anti-Hindu nor against other race or creed.
2. That the S.G.P.C has no desire for the establishment of Sikh Raj.⁵

Instead of appreciating the Sikh spirit of perfect non-cooperation during the struggle, Gandhi ji asked the S.G.P.C to give a description of the methods which will clearly set forth all the implications of non-violence. Realising that Sikhs can't accept his concept of non-violence, he tried to persuade them to accept it for limited purpose i.e., for Gurdawara reform movement. He wrote:—

“By the term I do not wish to convey that non-violence is to be regarded in the document referred to above as the final creed of the Sikhs which I know it is not. But I do understand that their methods, so far as that Gurdwara movement is concerned, will be absolutely non-violent, that is to say, the Akalies will be non-violent in thought, word and deed in connection with all persons, whether government officials, English and otherwise, or whether members of public to any denomination whatsoever who may be as opponents of the objects of the Akali movement.”⁶

According to Gandhi ji's concept, considerable number of men practicing satyagrah at the same time amounted to show of force. He therefore, suggested that instead of a **Shahidi Jatha** of 500 Sikhs, one or at the most two Sikhs should visit the Gurdwara at Jaito to assert their right. This suggestion was rightly rejected by the S.G P.C. as being against the principles of Sikhism. Secretary of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee informed Gandhi ji:—

“Government has frequently shifted its position and tried to impose restrictions on the number of pilgrims, number of paths and the period of stay of the Sangat in the Gurdawara. Acceptance of any of these limitations would mean, for the Sikhs, the surrender of the religious principle at stake.

In your suggestion about the limitation of Satyagrahis to “one or at the most two” you have not taken into account the significance of the institution of Sangat in Sikhism and the principle of numbers involved in the Jaito struggle. As you will see from the First chapter of the book “The Gurdwara Reform Movement,” the holding of, and worshipping in Sangat is an essential part of Sikhism. The Sangat is believed to be the Guru incorporate. From the time of Guru Nanak onwards, Sikhs in large numbers have been proceeding to Gurdawaras and congregating therein. The freedom of temples would mean nothing without the free and unfettered exercise of this right. The issue was never so clearly involved at any other place in this movement, therefore, some find it difficult to understand the developments of the struggle at Jaito.”⁷

Gandhi ji's suggestion that members of the jatha courting arrest should not disobey the orders of arrest pronounced by the British police officers was also rejected by the Sikhs. Secretary of the S.G.P.C. wrote to Gandhi ji:—

“So far as the question of disobeying the order of arrest has not arisen and this discussion is only academic. But if it comes to that the Sikhs believe that they have a right to disobey a mere order of arrest compatibly with their oath of non-violence. Of course, while disobeying such an order, only passive resistance is to be offered. There is absolutely to be no retaliation, but only more suffering is to be invited on ourselves by refusing to obey the mere words of command of arrest. If one word is to suffice to make us give up our pilgrimage and submit to cat-and-mouse policy then that prohibitory word could be pronounced as we step out of the Golden Temple or even, while we are in our homes. In fact that order has already been pronounced. If are not to move our legs at the mere presence of the order, we had better give up the movement itself.

Another practical consideration derived from experience is that suffering in order to be more effective must take the form of an impressive demonstration and its intensity must vary with the hardness of the oppressor's heart. It is a patent fact that government has become more and more hardened.”⁸

The above reply was in accordance with Gandhi ji's own conduct. But he had different standards to Sikh movement and his own civil disobedience. He had himself declared:—

“It is not a matter of carrying conviction by argument. The matter resolves itself into one of matching forces. Conviction or no conviction, Great Britain would defend her Indian commerce and interests by all the forces at her command. India must consequently evolve force enough to free herself from that embrace of death.” “The English Nation responds only to force. I was a believer in the politics of petitions, deputations and friendly negotiations. But all these have gone to dogs. I know these are not the ways to bring this government round. Sedition has become my religion, ours is a non-violent battle.”⁹

About Gandhi ji's civil disobedience movement, in a most revealing address to both Houses of the Indian Legislative Assembly in 1930, the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, declared:—

“In my judgement and in that of my Government it (The civil disobedience movement) is a deliberate attempt to coerce established authority by mass anion. Mass action, even if it is intended by its promoters to be non-violent, is nothing but the application of force under another form.”

Thus Gandhi ji's advice to Sikhs was just a repetition of his master's voice. It was in direct contradiction with his own conduct and utterances. Sikhs were wise enough to see through this game and rightly rejected it.

Mr. K.M. Pannikar, who was appointed by Gandhi ji as an observer to study the movement closely and to keep Gandhi ji informed about various developments from time to time wrote to Gandhi ji that Government was deliberately encouraging the idea that the Sikhs to establish a Sikh Raj with a view to create a wedge between the Hindus and Sikhs. He, therefore, suggested that

Gandhi ji should issue a statement that the religious demands of the Sikhs were just and would be supported by a political agitation.

But Gandhi ji did not make any such statement. He rather asked the Sikhs to stop agitation (which he himself later described as first decisive battle for India's freedom) till independence. He wrote:—

“But I would ask the Akali Sikhs not to send any more jathas without further deliberation and consultation with those leaders outside the Sikh community who have hitherto been giving them advice.....I would therefore, have you to search yourself and if you find that you have not been true to the standard you set before yourselves to cease further demonstration for the time being.”¹⁰

He later wrote to the S.G.P.C. that, “My recent letter was merely an advice to suspend and not necessarily to stop altogether the sending of the then impending Shahidi Jatha.”

Gandhi's attitude alienated him from the Sikhs. Sardar Mangal Singh, Gandhi's lieutenant among the Sikhs, informed him that he had failed to bring about the other Sikh leaders to Gandhi's view and that he had ceased to have anything to do with the movement.

1. Gooroo Ram Singh and the Kuka Sikhs — Documents 1863-4871 compiled by Nahar Singh.
2. Essays in Sikhism by Teja Singh — Page 77.
3. Vide Mahatma — Vol. II — Page 171.
4. Struggle for reform in Sikh Shrines by Ruchi Ram Sahni Page 216-217.
5. Letter dated 4-3-1924 reproduced in Some Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement by Ganda Singh Page 54.
6. Ibid
7. Letter dated April 20, 1924 reproduced in Some Confidential Papers of The Akali Movement by Dr. Ganda Singh at Page-65.
8. Letter dated April 20, 1924 reproduced in Some Confidential Papers of The Akali Movement by Dr. Ganda Singh at Page-68.
9. Gandhi: His RELEVANCE For Our Times by Gene Sharp-P-54.
10. Quoted in Gandhi ji and the Akalis — by P.C. Roy Chaudhery in Times of India dated August 3, 1969.

LUCKNOW PACT AND AFTER

“There is not and never was an India”

(Sir John Stracher)

Is there a people of India? Can the diversified assembly of races and religions, with the barriers and division of caste, of language and other differences, and with the widely varying range of social and cultural levels, inhibiting the vast sub-continental expanse of India, be considered a “nation”, or ever become a nation?

If these questions were asked from our ancestors living a century ago, they would have replied in the negative because to them India in this sense had no meaning and no existence.

When the struggle against the British rule started, an attempt was made for the first time to inject the spirit of nationalism in the people of India. But even at that time concept of nationalism was given a narrow meaning. It was founded on the bedrock of common religion, culture and historical tradition but, was given a Hindu colour.

In Bengal Naba Gopal started an association called “National Society” and edited a paper called “National Paper.” The avowed object of the National Society was the promotion of unity and national feeling among the Hindus. When objection was taken to the use of the word “national” Naba boldly argued in his paper that the Hindus certainly formed a nation by themselves. He supported his theory by the following argument:—

“Nationalism is based on unity which is brought about, sustained and promoted in different people by different means such as love of liberty among the Greeks, Romans and the English, and the Mosaic law among the Jews. The basis of national unity in India is Hindu religion. Hindu nationality embraces all the Hindus of India irrespective of their locality or language. The Hindus are destined to be a religious nation.”¹

Congress leaders organising anti-British movement in India concentrated more on appealing to the communal sentiments of the people rather than rousing national enthusiasm. Leaders like B.G. Tilak organised “Ganesh Festival” and “Shivaji Festival” and tried to infuse religious fervour among the Hindus. The result was that the religious pride was made to precede the national pride and Congress leaders appeared to be active protagonists of Hindu revivalism.

At the very height of the national non-cooperation movement when Gandhi ji stood as leader of the united national movement, and had the responsibility to make his every utterance as the leader of a united movement, he was publicly proclaiming himself a “Sanatanist Hindu” (a kind of extremist Hindu). He wrote:—

“I call myself a Sanatani Hindu because:—

- I) I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and all that goes by the name Hindu scriptures, and therefore in avataras and rebirth.²
- II) I believe in the Varnashrama Dharma, in a sense in my opinion strictly Vedic.

III) I believe in the protection of the cow in its much larger sense than the popular.

IV) I do not believe in idol worship.

When Gandhi ji was asked why he was propagating ahimsa, the spinning wheel, tricolour, the Sanskritized Vandematram, fasts, cow protection and Hindu prayers, which were symptoms of Hindu religious revival, instead of propagating economic and political policies of his party, he proclaimed that the approach was personal or exclusive to himself and that he was not the official head of the party (Congress) nor even a four anna member of the Congress.³ But many a men could judge that under the garb of Swaraj, Gandhi ji was aspiring for the establishment of Hindu Raj.

Gandhi ji's "Harijan Sewa" was also motivated by his desire to retain the untouchables within the Hindu fold. He told Dr. Ambedkar:—

"I am against the political separation of the untouchables from the Hindus. That would be absolutely suicidal."

The Muslim masses became apprehensive by the strong Hindu religious flavour of Congress propaganda. They felt that Gandhi ji was trying to identify the national awakening with revival of Hinduism. Their apprehensions were strengthened by Gandhi jis conduct. Even when appealing for Hindu-Muslim unity, Gandhi ji made the appeal not as a national leader appealing to both sections, but as a Hindu leader. This Hindus were "we"; the Muslims were "they".

"We shall have to go in for tapasya, for self purification. If we want to win the hearts of Muslims."

The result was that majority of the Muslims disassociated themselves from the Congress.

To please the Muslims, Gandhi ji entered into an agreement with them, which is known as Lucknow pact. It conferred several undue concessions on the Muslims and the Harijans but completely by passed the Sikhs. There was strong resentment among the Sikhs who felt that Gandhi ji had betrayed them.

Gandhi ji tried to induce the Sikhs to accept Hinduism on the glib plea that they were only a sect or part of the reform movement within Hinduism but he was rebuffed by the Sikhs. He wrote in Young India on October 1, 1925.:—

"I do not regard Sikhism as a religion distinct from Hinduism. I regard it as part of Hinduism and reformation in the same sense that Vaishnavism is. I read in the Yervada prison all the writings that I could lay my hands upon regarding the Sikhs. I read portions of Granth Sahib. Its deeply spiritual and moral tone I found to be uplifting. In the collection of hymns we have at the Ashram, we have some of Guru Nanak's also. At the same time I do non quarrel with the Sikhs for considering, if they wish, Sikhism as totally distinct from Hinduism and when during my first visit to Punjab a few Sikh friends told me that my reference to Sikhism as part of Hinduism displeased them I ceased to refer to it as such."⁴

Sikhs refused to fall into the trap laid for them by Gandhi ji and started organising themselves to safeguard their interests. Feeling that he had alienated the support and sympathy of the Sikhs, Gandhi ji along with Ali Brothers attended the session of the Sikh League at Amritsar and begged for Sikh support for his non-co-operation movement out by holding out his plighted word that he would not repeat the policy of Lucknow pact. Sikhs, the simple folk, could not see through Gandhi's diplomacy and made tremendous sacrifices by joining Gandhi's movement. They got their reward with the "Nehru Report". It recommended weightage for all minorities except the Sikhs whom it offered as a scape goat at the altar of Muslim domination. That was how Gandhian crosses were distributed for gallantry in the fight for independence. How could the Sikhs who did not accept Gandhian of non-violence be considered for any military decoration by the G.I.C. Gandhi.

Sikhs again protested against this Brahminical dispensation. At the all parties conference held at Calcutta the Sikh leaders spoke their grievances to Gandhi ji who expressed his helplessness to remedy the wrong done. Gandhi ji could fight for the Muslims or the Harijans but could not utter even a word of protest for the Sikhs. He could only keep quiet. He knew he over the simple folk again by making generous promises which he need not fulfill. But there was a growing feeling among the Sikhs that Gandhi ji was indifferent to Sikh urges and ignoring Sikh interests.

Therefore, in 1929, when All India National Congress met at the bank of the Ravi river, the Sikhs took out a five hundred thousand strong procession under the leadership of veteran Sikh leader, Baba Kharak Singh, to impress upon Gandhi ji the idea of Sikh disillusionment with anti-Sikh policies pursued by Congress. Mahatma Gandhi along with Pandit Moti Lal Nehru went to meet Baba Kharak Singh and gave the Sikhs a solemn assurance that after India achieved political freedom, no constitution would be framed by the majority community unless it was acceptable to the Sikhs⁵ and further promised to bury the Nehru report in the sands of Ravi. But those solemn assurances were soon forgotten. When the British Government, announced the communal award which the Sikhs rejected as it was detrimental to their interests Gandhi ji did not make any protest and kept silent.

Gandhi ji's conduct did not inspire confidence among the Sikhs who continued to express their apprehension from time to time. Speaking at Gurdwara Sisganj Delhi, before an audience of Sikhs, Gandhi ji stated:—

“I venture to suggest that the non-violence creed of the Congress is the surest guarantee of good faith and our Sikh friends have no reason to fear that it would betray them. For, the moment it did so, the Congress would not only thereby seal its own doom but that of country too. Sikhs are a people. They know how to safeguard their rights by the exercise of arms if it should ever come to that.”

“Sardar Madhusudan Singh in his speech has asked for an assurance that Congress would do nothing that might alienate the sympathies of this Sikhs from the Congress. Well, the Congress in its Lahore session passed a resolution that it would non endorse any settlement with regard to the minority question that failed to satisfy any of the minorities concerned. What further assurance can the Congress give you to set you at ease I really fail to understand.

“..... I ask you to accept my word and the resolution of the Congress that it will not betrays single individual, much less a community. If it ever thinks of doing so, it will only

hasten its own doom. No nation determined to immolate itself at the altar of freedom can be guilty of breach of faith. My life has been an open book. I have no secrets and I encourage no secrets. I pray you, therefore, to unbosom yourselves of all your doubts and apprehensions and shall try to meet you as best as I can. What more shall I say? What more can I say than this? Let God be witness of the bond that binds me and the Congress with you.”

But did Gandhi ji keep his word? No! He was never sincere even to his own party. “The Gita”, wrote Gandhi ji, “has been a mother to me ever since I became first acquainted with in 1859. I turn to it for guidance in every difficulty and the desired guidance has always been forth coming.” “He who has one thing in mind,” says Gita. “but represents another thing others, what sin he is not capable of committing? For, he is s thief and robber of his own self.” “Therefore”, wrote Gandhi ji in the Harijan of August 9, 1942, “I have been a votary of Truth from my childhood. It was the most natural thing for me. As a result of prayful quest, then came to me the revelation that ‘Truth in God’ instead of the commonly held view that, “God is Truth”. But was Gandhi ji really so, is doubtful At the Lahore Congress, at the und of 1929, resolution for “Puran Swaraj” i.e., complete independence, was adopted under the guidance of Gandhi ji and it was resolved to launch civil disobedience movement for its attainment. But immediately after the Lahore session, Gandhi ji published a statement through the New York World of January 9:—

“The Independence resolution need frighten nobody” and on January 30 through his paper Young India, he made an offer of eleven points covering various reforms (rupee ratio of 15-4d. total prohibition,” reduction of land revenue and military expenditure protective tariff on foreign cloth, etc) in return for which he offered to call off the civil disobedience movement. Was it not an attempt to hoodwink the masses, who had responded to the Congress call and was it not the betrayal of the defined aim of the Campaign? But Gandhi ji was never in favour of the demand although due so pressure of public opinion he had to voice it. In 1921, at Ahmedabad when Maulana Hasrat Mohani made the demand for Sawraj, Gandhi ji had led the opposition to it saying “the demand has grieved me because it shows a lack of responsibility.”

So, Gandhi ji soon forgot the solemn assurance given by him to the Sikhs. When the question of deciding the National Flag for India came up, the Sikhs were again ignored. Describing the significance of the colours and the designs of the proposed flag, Gandhi ji had said:—

“At Bezwada I asked Mr. P. Venkayya to give me a design containing a spinning wheel on red (Hindu colour) and green (Muslim colour) background. His enthusiastic spirit enabled me to possess a flag in three hours. It was just a little late for presentation to the All India Congress Committee. I am glad it was so. On maturer consideration, I saw that the background should represent the other religions also. Hindu Muslim unity is not an exclusive term. It is an inclusive term, symbolic of the unity of all faiths domiciled in India. If Hindus and Muslims can tolerate each other they are together bound to tolerate all other faiths. The unity is not a menace to other faiths represented in India or to the world. So I suggest that the background should be white and green and red. The white portion is intended to represent all other faiths. The weakest numerically occupy the first place, the Islamic Colour comes next, the Hindu Colour, red, comes last, the idea being that the strongest should act as a shield to the weakest. The white colour, moreover, represents purity and peace. Our national flag must mean that or nothing. And to represent the equality of the least of us with the best, an equal part is assigned to all the three colours in the design.”⁶

Sikhs demanded that they being the third major party to the struggle for India's freedom should be given specific representation on the national flag. Gandhi ji, instead of exerting his influence to get the Sikhs their due representation on the proposed national flag tried to pacify them with false promises and lame excuses. He tried to cool them off by suggesting that time was not ripe for such a confrontation. He said:—

“.....Then there is the controversy about the inclusion of the Sikh colour in the national flag. No blame can possibly attach to the Congress in this respect. The present design was suggested by me. The Congress has not even formally adopted it. I had offered to the Sikh friends to place before the All India Congress Committee their view point if they could apprise me of it. But as it turned out the A.I.C.C. could not meet after that and no one knows as to when it will be able to meet at all. Even the Working Committee is out today on sufferance. To raise this controversy at this time, the time when the Congress is fighting for its very existence would to say the least, an unseemly act.”

But Sikhs were not satisfied by these hollow promises and they continued pressing their demand for proper representation on the national flag. Although unwillingly, Gandhi ji had to refer the question of national flag to the A.I.C.C. for suggesting alterations in it, to meet the objections from the Sikh community. Gandhi ji on April 8, 1931, speaking at Amritsar said:—

“Take my attitude on the national flag question. The national flag is my own personal creation. It has been before the country for ten years and a lot of sentiment has gathered round it, much sacrifice and suffering has been gone through to keep it flying. Do you think it is a pleasure to me to agree to its being altered? But I know that you are dissatisfied and if only to please your community I agreed to have a Committee about the flag.”⁷

But again a hoax was played upon the Sikhs. Instead of giving them due representation on the national flag, just a new interpretation was put forward to silence the Sikhs. On August 7, 1931, A.I.C.C. confirmed the following change in the national flag:—

“The flag is to be three coloured, horizontally arranged as before, but the colours shall be saffron, white and green in the order stated here from top to bottom with the spinning wheel in dark blue in the centre of the white strip; it being understood that the colours have no communal significances but that saffron represents Courage and sacrifice, white, peace and truth, and green shall represent faith and chivalry and the spinning wheel the hope of the masses.”⁸

Baba Kharak Singh, the veteran Sikh leader, whose election as president of Punjab Congress in 1922 Gandhi ji had hailed as an honour to the Congress and “an excellent choice” and whom Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru had described as “the bravest among the captains of our struggle for freedom,” refused to accept the flag as such and declared his intention to start a campaign to get proper representation for the Sikhs. Gandhi ji was so upset that he lost his mental balance and completely forgot the sacrifices made by Baba Kharak Singh. He said:—

“The Flag controversy is being conducted mostly by those who have held aloof from the present movement.”⁹

He tried to satisfy the Sikhs by sheer sweet talking. He said:—

“The Sikhs have given their loyal and unstinted co-operation to the Congress in many parts of India like Bombay, Delhi, etc. but these brave people have never bothered themselves about the flag question. A brave man always gives credit to the other party for its bonafides Why don't you have faith? If the Congress should play false afterwards, you can well settle scores with it, for you hold the sword. I would ask you, therefore, to cast out suspicion and distrust from your mind and plunge into the sacred Yajna of freedom whole heartedly. You will find that when you are ready to make the extreme sacrifice you will disdain to ask for guarantees. It will be for others to look up to you as the champions of their rights as it will be for you no fulfill their expectations.....”¹⁰

Realising that Sikhs might not fall into his trap this time and might disassociate themselves with his movement, Gandhi ji held out a mild threat by saying:—

“You may not obstruct if you cannot help..... What I have said about the Muslims applies equally to Sikhs. If thirty lakhs of Sikhs will obstruct Indian independence, we shall deal with them non-violently. Non-violent Sawraj cannot be won except by non-violence.”¹¹

Sikhs were again taken in by these promises. A rift among the Sikh leaders developed on the controversy and with it the Sikhs demand for due representation on the flag died down.

Sikhs thoroughly trusted Gandhi ji and again plunged themselves heart and soul into the freedom movement organised by the Congress under the leadership of Gandhi. When meetings in Delhi were banned and the Congress committee could not assemble, a band of one hundred Sikh volunteers engaged the police in front of the Kotwali and suffered batons and lathies and thus they enabled the Congress committee to meet at Fatehpuri and adopt resolutions. Again, when the Khan brothers faced difficulty in Peshawar, the Congress deputed one hundred Akali Sikhs to rush to their aid and bear the batons from the police; which was done promptly. Thus the Sikhs formed the suicide squad in the Congress movement.

What was the reward? In 1937 when Congress gained control of Government in as many as seven provinces under the leadership of Gandhi ji, in pursuance of Government of India Act, 1935, it persisted in its policies with a view to demoralizing the Sikhs. Over fifty Sikh bodyguards of the Governor of Bombay, were replaced by Hindus. Bombay, with a Congress Government remained the solitary province in India, where the restriction on the length of Kirpan, the religious symbol of the Sikhs was not withdrawn. Gandhi ji did not intervene to undo this injustice by his own party government. He could fast unto death if the Hindu solidarity was jeopardized but not when the Sikhs were being denied freedom of conscience.

In 1932, at the time of second round table conference, when the British government through Sardar Balladur Shivdev Singh, then a member of the Indian Secretary of State Council made an offer to the Sikhs than if they disassociated finally with the Congress movement, they would be given a decisive political weightage in the Punjab, such as would lead to their emergence as third independent element in India after the British transferred power to the inhabitants of this sub continent, Sikh leaders rejected it. Similarly, S. Baldev Singh under the influence of Congress leaders rejected cabinet mission's offer to provide suitable safeguards for the Sikhs in the Independence Act of India. But the Congress leaders including Gandhi ji let down the Sikhs. The

Sikhs at the time of transfer of power found themselves in a predicament. Congress leaders on whom they had depended, deserted them. Their dependence on Congress and the Sikh representative's dittoing of Congress attitude had taken away much of their weight which they could have otherwise carried in the deliberations for the grant of freedom or the ultimate decisions with regard to that. Gandhi ji and other Congress leaders took Sikh support for granted and therefore ignored them. Jinnah regarded and skillfully demonstrated them as only an appendix of the Congress. Consequently, Sikh interests were completely ignored and when Gandhi ji accepted the partition of Punjab, Sikhs felt themselves to be sacrificed on the alters of Muslim ambition and Hindu opportunism.

JALLIANWALA BAGH TRAGEDY

At the end of world war, when the Indians were waiting for a change of heart on the part of the British Government, Rowlatt Act, with drastic provisions for arrest and trial without any of the checks and formalities which law is expected to provide, was passed. There was universal opposition on the part of Indians of all shades of opinion. Gandhi ji gave a call for Civil Disobedience and the Sikhs who had been moved by Gandhi ji's rosy pictures of Sawraj, joined the movement on a large scale.

On April 6, 1919, there was a complete hartal at Amritsar (Holy city of the Sikhs) in response to Gandhi's call. Government arrested Congress leaders of the town. On April 10, the citizens went round in a big procession to protest against the arrest of Dr Satyapal and Dr Kitchlew, the Congress leaders, and were fired at by the police. The retreating mob committed a few stray incidents of violence.

The authorities could not maintain their composure when the martial people of the Punjab began to entertain political ambitions. The news that the inhabitants of the surrounding villages had formed a "Danda Fauj" with a view to end the British rule in India made them almost panicky.

Brigadier General Sir Michael O' Dwyer, Governor of Punjab, was one of His Britannic Majesty's less imaginative and humane straps. His subordinate, Brigadier General R.E.H. Dyer, was even worse. Sir Michael sent General Dyer to Amritsar with a regiment of British troops to maintain order.¹² He placed a ban on all public meetings.

On Baisakhi day, Guru Gobind Singh, had baptised the Sikhs and established Khalsa Panth. This day is celebrated by the Sikhs in particular and Punjabis in general, in a big way, it being also a seasonal festival. Therefore, on April 13, 1919, at Baisakhi Mela several hundred people gathered in an enclosed place called Jallianwala Bagh to protest against police atrocities.

General Dyer, went to the place with a body of troops and armoured cars equipped with machine guns and without giving any warning, ordered the troops to fire till the ammunition was exhausted. Sir Valentine Chirol has described the scene thus:—

“One cannot possibly realize the frightfulness of it until one has actually looked upon on the Jallianwala Bagh — once a garden, but in modern times a waste space frequently used for and public meetings, about the size perhaps of Trafalgar Square and closed in almost entirely by walls above which rise the backs of native houses facing into the congested streets of the city. I entered by the same narrow lane by which General Dyer entered with about fifty rifles. I stood on the same rising ground on which he stood, when without a warning, he opened fire at about hundred yards range upon a dense crowd, collected mainly in the lower and more distant part of the enclosure around a platform from which speeches were being delivered. The crowd was estimated by him at 6.000 by others at 10.000 and more, practically unarmed, and all quite defenceless. This panic-stricken multitude broke at once but for ten consecutive minutes he kept up a merciless fusillade — in all 1650 rounds — on that seething mass of humanity caught like rats in trap, vainly rushing for the very

narrow exits or lying flat on the ground to escape the rain of bullets, which he personally directed not to the points where the crowd was the thickest. The ‘targets’ to use his own words, were good, and when at the end of those ten minutes, having almost exhausted his ammunition, he marched his men off by the way they came. He had killed, according to the official figures wrung out of Government mouths later, 379, and he left about 200 wounded on the ground for whom, again to use his own word, he did not consider it his ‘job’ to take the slightest thought.”¹³

That was not all. There were other even more shameful deeds all over Punjab. Martial law was imposed. The functioning of ordinary criminal courts was suspended. Punjab was cut from the rest of India by a rigid censorship; hardly any news was allowed to go and it was very difficult for people to enter or leave the province. There was one street in Amritsar when a Young English Woman had been attacked during the rioting. British soldiers cordoned it off and for days every Indian who was obliged to go that way was forced to crawl the length of it on his belly. Thousands of students were compelled to walk sixteen miles a day for roll calls and the school children were compelled to attend parade to salute the flag.

Gandhi ji instead of condemning the wholesale slaughter of hundreds of unarmed men (more than half of them were Sikhs)¹⁴ condemned the violent spirit shown by the masses. He was not even willing to visit Punjab to condole people who had sacrificed at his asking. The All India Congress Committee which met on April 20 to demand an inquiry into the Punjab wrongs, pressed Gandhi ji to proceed to the Punjab immediately in disregard of consequences. But Gandhi ji who had exhorted people to disobey the laws had not the courage to do so, himself. He wrote to the Viceroy asking for permission. “If I proceed without the necessary permission, I should not be allowed to cross the boundary of Punjab and should be left to what satisfaction I could have from civil disobedience,” thought Gandhi. He, therefore, dropped the idea of visiting Punjab under the excuse that he did not see around him the kind of peaceful atmosphere that he wanted.¹⁵ On the other hand he sent an assurance to the government by writing to the private to the Viceroy on May 11:—

“I need hardly assure you that the whole of my weight will be thrown absolutely on the side of preserving peace. The Viceroy has a right to rely upon my doing nothing less. But my weight will be absolutely nothing if I received no support from the Government.”¹⁶

There was general resentment against the cruelty on the Punjab. Rabinder Nath Tagore renounced his knight hood as a protest. He wrote to Lord Chelmsford on May 30:—

“The enormity of the measures taken by the Government of the Punjab for quelling some local disturbances has, with a rude shock, revealed to our minds the helplessness of our position as British subjects in India, The disproportionate severity of the punishments inflicted upon the unfortunate people and the methods of carrying them out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilised governments, barring some conspicuous exceptions, recent or remote. Considering that such treatment has been meted out to a population, disarmed and resourceless, by a power which has the most terribly organized organization for destruction of human lives, we must strongly assert that it can claim no political expediency, far less moral justification. The accounts of the insults and sufferings undergone by our brothers in the Punjab have trickled through the gagged silence, reaching every corner of India, and the universal agony of indignation roused in the hearts of the

people has been ignored by our rulers-possibly congratulating themselves for imparting what they imagine as salutary lessons. Knowing that our appeals have been vain and the passion of vengeance is blinding the noble vision of statesmanship of our government which could so easily afford to be magnanimous, as befitting its physical strength and moral tradition, the very least that I can do for my country is to take all consequences upon myself in giving voice to the protest of the millions of my countrymen, surprised to a dumb anguish of terror. The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in the incongruous context of humiliation, and I, for my part, wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of those countrymen who, for their so called insignificance, are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings. And these are the reasons which have compelled me to painfully ask Your Excellency, with due deference and regret, to relieve me of my title of knighthood which I had the honour to accept from His Majesty the King, at the hand of your predecessor for whose nobleness of heart I still entertain great admiration.”¹⁷

Gandhi's sympathy was only skin deep. He did not return the Kaiser-i-Hind Medal awarded to him in 1915.¹⁸ On November 24, 1919, when Gandhi ji was presiding over the All India Khilafat conference at Delhi, it was suggested to him by some friends that he should give a call for a boycott of the peace celebrations by the government at the end of world war, in view of the humiliation of Punjab, but Gandhi ji declined.

He could not withstand the government's threats and called off his civil disobedience movement and thus betrayed the Punjabies at this crucial moment. He said:—

“The Government of India has given me, through His Excellency the Governor of Bombay, a grave warning that the resumption of civil disobedience is likely to be attended with serious consequence to public security. This warning has been reinforced by His Excellency the Governor himself at the interviews to which I was summoned. In response to these warnings and the urgent desire expressed by Dewan Bahadur Govind Raghava Aiyer, Sir Narayan Chandavarkar and several editors, I have after deep consideration decided not to resume civil resistance for the time being.”¹⁹

At the Amritsar Congress session when a resolution was passed condemning the government for repressive measures in Punjab, Gandhi moved another resolution disapproving of the acts of violence committed by the people. Tilak opposed Gandhi's resolution but had to accept it under pressure from Gandhi.

Gandhi ji even exonerated General Dyer, who had murdered hundreds of innocent Punjabies. He wrote:—

“And who could be more cruel or blood-thirsty than the late General Dyer. Yet, the Jallianwala Bagh Congress Inquiry Committee, on my advice, had refused to ask for his prosecution. I had no trace of ill will against him in my heart. I would have also liked to meet him personally and reach his heart, but that was to remain a mere aspiration.”²⁰

But of all the Indians, Sikhs were all the most bitter against the leaders of the tragedy i.e., the then Lieut. Governor of Punjab, Sir Michael O' Dwyer and General Dyer. S. Udham Singh of Sunam, who had lost some of his near and dear ones in the Jallianwala tragedy, went to England and on 30th March, 1940, when Sir Michael was delivering a speech at the Caxton Hall in London

at a meeting of the East Indian Association and Royal central Asian Society, Udham Singh shot him dead. The other General Dyer had already died a miserable death in 1927. Thus Sikhs settled their accounts with the one who was responsible for Jallianwala horror.
horror.

Thus Gandhi ji might have stirred the conscience of the Indian people but he had definitely betrayed the people of Punjab.

NABHA EPISODE

Nabha State, with an area of about one thousand square miles and inhabited mainly by Sikh Jats, has always played a vital and important role in the Sikh history. In the chain of Sikh States, ruling houses of Patiala, Jind and Nabha belonged to the same family i.e., Phulkian family and Nabha branch of the family was senior to that of Patiala, but it was reduced to secondary position due to lack of political opportunism in its rulers and their continuous loyalty to the Khalsa Panth regardless of the consequences.

During the regime of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Raja Jaswant Singh of Nabha was perhaps the only ruler from among the Cis-Sutlaj chiefs who did not seek friendship with the British and when Maharaja Ranjit Singh attempted the conquest of Cis-Sutlaj' territories to make them part of the Khalsa Raj, Raja Jaswant Singh of Nabha was his close ally throughout. His successor Raja Davinder Singh too was wavering in his loyalty to the British, particularly when the British army suffered an ignoble defeat at Kabul. During the Anglo-Sikh war of 1845-46, Raja of Nabha alone, out of the Cis-Sutlaj chiefs, refused to render any assistance to the British; rather he was hostile in his attitude. British forfeited part of Nabha State territory by way of penalty for inimical attitude of the Nabha ruler and this forfeited territory of Nabha State was ceded to Patiala, Faridkot and Jind States.

But these penalties did not deter the Nabha rulers from fighting for the Sikh cause. During struggle for reform in Sikh shrines, Ripudaman Singh, openly expressed his sympathy for the Akali movement and he wore a black turban on the Nankana Sahib Martyr's Day organised by the Akalies. The black was an anathema to the British officials and any Sikh wearing black turban was harassed and prosecuted in every possible way. In the army very strict injunctions were issued against the wearing of black turbans by the Sikhs even when they were off duty.

Maharaja Ripudaman Singh incurred the serious displeasure of the British authorities who were intolerant of the slightest exhibition of a spirit of independence in a feudatory prince. Taking advantage of a personal dispute between the young princes of Patiala and Nabha, the British authorities forced Maharaja of Nabha to seek exile from his state. In a letter written to Lord Reading, Viceroy and of India regarding his abdication and treatment by Political Agent, Maharaja Ripudaman Singh wrote "I venture to with all the emphasis at my command that I did not seek an interview with Col. Minchin of my own free will and accord nor did I, in the interview, offer to abdicate. On the other hand, I was driven into the presence of the Agent by clever schemers and it was he who demanded abdication from me threatening worse and dire consequences in case of my non-compliance."

Sikhs took to heart, the deposition of the Maharaja of Nabha and his replacement by a British administrator and treated it as an affront. Consequently, an agitation was started to get the Maharaja restored. For protesting against the deposition of the Sikh Maharaj of Nabha, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee was declared an unlawful association by the Government. All its leaders and active members were arrested and tried on charges of sedition against the king but the agitation for the recall of the Nabha ruler continued with redoubled zeal. Government proposed through Bhai Jodh Singh, the setting up of a Council of Administration during the minority of the deposed Maharaj's son, Pratap Singh, comprising a Sikh as president and majority

of Sikh as members. But the Sikh leaders refused to agree to anything lesser than the recall of Maharaja Ripudaman Singh.

Though in the normal way the masses had little sympathy for the princes, agitation for the recall of Nabha's Maharaja provided a good excuse falling out with the British. Sikh leaders approached Gandhi ji for help but, Gandhi ji felt apprehensive of growing Sikh nationalism and political consciousness. He therefore tried to snatch initiative from the Sikhs. He wrote to the Sikh leaders that: "if the Maharaja makes a public statement that all the writings were practically extorted from him and that he is quite willing and anxious that all the facts against him should be published and if he is prepared to face all the consequences of the agitation viz. deprivation of titles, annuity and of all his allegations regarding duress can be proved, it is possible to carry an effective and even successful agitation". "In any event", wrote Gandhi ji "when the declaration of the kind mentioned is made by the Maharaja, the agitation should be all India agitation. The Akalis should merely assist elucidation of facts."

This Gandhi ji instead of supporting the Akali movement for recall of the Maharaja of Nabha, caused its failure. His willingness to assume charge of the movement caused differences among the organisers. Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri, one of the original promoters of the Akali movement, Sardar Amar Singh of Jhabbal and about two dozen members of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee fell in the deep trap laid by Gandhi ji and pressed for discontinuance of the agitation by the committee on the ground that the question of the recall of Maharaj Ripudaman Singh was purely political and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee being a religious body ought not to pursue it.

These cracks in Akali ranks stiffened the British Government attitude and Viceroy and Governor General of India publically declared that "there should be no allusion in this respect that His Highness has ceased for all times to rule in Nabha and this decision is irrevocable." The result was that the Sikh leaders who were running the agitation with great enthusiasm assumed a lukewarm attitude, at the suggestion of Congress leaders, thus neither dropping the question nor making it a life and question and started giving a different colour to the agitation to enable them to wriggle out, honourably out of the situation which had developed. Thus soon the agitation for restoration of the kingdom of Maharaja of Nabha fizzled out and Maharaja who had helped the Akalies at all crucial moments was betrayed.

THE SWORD

In 1699, when Guru Gobind Singh instituted the Khalsa Brotherhood, he enjoined the 5 symbols which every member of the Khalsa Brotherhood should always keep. These symbols are:—

- (i) The hair (Keshas),
- (ii) The comb (Kanga),
- (iii) The shorts (Kachcha),
- (iv) The steel bangle (Kara),
- (v) The Sword (Kirpan).

Taken collectively, these symbols serve as a uniform binding the Khalsa into one brotherhood, eliminating all caste distinctions or differences of race. By wearing these symbols, all Sikhs come to resemble their spiritual father, Guru Gobind Singh, and they also resemble each other as members of the same family, contempt for worldly or material considerations.

Kanga:

The comb is meant to keep the hair tidy. It symbolises tidiness, cleanliness and the right discipline of mind.

Kachcha:

The shorts symbolise chastity, self control and freedom of both body and spirit, Freedom of the body for an active fighting life, and freedom of the spirit from the bonds of false belief.

Kara:

Steel bangle was worn to protect the wrist from the twanging of the bow string. Its spiritual significance is that it reminds of the circle of eternity i.e., the timeless and each of these symbols has its own individual significance.

Keshas:

Ancient sages, saints and yogis in India always kept their hair long, so the long hair had become the accepted symbol of sainthood. Moreover, the uncut hair represents the complete, whole and natural person as God created him. The complete and uncut body is the outer reflection of the complete and perfect spirit — the spirit unlimited and unspoiled by worldly consideration; the perfection towards which the Sikh must strive. Further, to keep the hair, especially in defiance of conventional society, is to assert the total freedom of the spirit and to show immortality of the spiritual Reality.

Kirpan:

The sword symbolises, the aspect of God's supreme power to which we turn for justice; and for the protection of righteousness in the face of the powers of evil. The sword was also worn for the practical purposes of self-defence. The right to carry arms showed the Sikhs to be an

independent and free person having self respect, and sovereignty, and having both the right and the obligations to protect others from unjust oppression.

Guru Har Gobind, the Sixth Guru, wore two swords as emblems of his spiritual and temporal authority.

Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Guru, in Vichitar Natak has glorified the Sword as God and invoked its blessing and urged upon his followers to worship it as a symbol of authority and dignity.

Guru ji writes:

“Sword, that smiteth in a flash
That scatters the armies of the wicked
In the Great battlefield
O thou symbol of the brave,
Thine arm is Irresistible,
Thy brightness shineth forth
The blaze of the splendour dazzling like the sun
Sword thou art the protector of the saints,
Thou art the scourge of the wicked,
Scatterer of sinners, I take refuge in Thee.
Hail, the Creator, Saviour and Sustainer,
Hail to Thee : Sword Supreme”

This, however did not mean that Guru ji believed in unleashing undue force. He wanted the Sikhs to be saint warriors i.e., the wielder of sword not like brutes but like men imbued with a mission.

Says Guru ji:

“Blessed is he who even when he wars, keeps God in his Heart.” Sword is to fight the tyrant and to protect the weak. Guru ji enjoined “whatever one’s strength one must not annoy the weak”. He prays for “Food for the poor and sword for the tyrant, O’ God, let both go hand in hand”. He declared “He alone is wise, who fears not another, nor maketh other afraid”.

Sword is to be kept in a sheath and worn in a belt. It is not to be used lightly or for personal aggrandisement. Only when all other means have failed can the use of sword be justified.

Says Guru ji:

When there is no other course open to man, it is but righteous to unsheathe the sword”.

Gandhi ji in the beginning of his political career appeared to be a true follower of Guru Gobind Singh. For in this regard he said:—

“I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. Thus when my eldest son asked me what he should have done, had he been present when I was almost fatally assaulted in 1908, whether he should have used his

physical force which he could and wanted to use, and defend me, I told him that it was his duty to defend me even by using violence. Hence it was that I took part in the Boer War, the so called Zulu Rebellion and the Boer war. Hence also do I advocate training in arms for those who believe in the method of violence. I would rather have India resort to arms to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour”.²¹

He admired Sikhs for their bravery and courage. He told a prayer meeting:—

“There were the brave Sikhs whose leaders had been to see him. He had explained to them what it meant by one Sikh being equal to one lakh and one fourth, of persons. It was the courage of one to stand firm, in spite of the opposition of one lakh and one fourth of men. And this could only mean bravery of the highest and of the purest kind. If they had that faith and courage born of non-violence, they would be worthy of the proud name Khalsa. That was the lesson that he had learnt from the Granth Saheb and the Khalsa History.”²²

He appreciated the real significance of kirpan worn by the Sikhs. Addressing a Sikh congregation he said:—

“The kirpan is a symbol of sanctity to be exhibited and to be used in defence of the helpless and the innocent. The tenth and the last Guru of the Sikhs, undoubtedly, wielded the sword, but never, so far as I know, at the expense of the weak. He had imposed many restraints upon himself. He had many reputed Muslim disciples. So had the other Gurus, beginning with Nanak Saheb. Your bravery will be testified when all those who belong to different faiths, including Muslims, become your sincere friends.”²³

But while apparently eulogising the Sikhs for keeping the sword, he displayed ulterior motives. He tried to woo the Sikhs to part with an essential symbol of faith i.e., kirpan. He said:—

“The Sikhs had to come up to the higher bravery that non-violence would give them, as compared to the bravery of the sword. The Sikhs were very industrious. They were to be found in Canada. They were responsible largely for building the railway to Nairobi and several other things he could mention. He adjured them to shed the drinking habit and the enervation brought about by the luxurious habits in which Sikh women he had heard were indulging. It would not do to remind him that others were better. The Sikhs, if they were to keep up their renown, the fewness of number could only be made up for by their being unequalled in courage and correct thinking born of simple life. The sword was a rusty weapon. Its very effective substitute was the force of the spirit which cost nothing and which was indestructible.”²⁴

Again he said:—

“There were the brave Sikhs, each one of whom considered himself equivalent to one lakh and one fourth. Did it mean um one Sikh could shed as much blood as one lakh and one fourth? He thought not. It meant that one Sikh could stand up to one and one fourth lakh persons against him. In that sense, it was a tribute to the bravery of the Sikhs. Not one Sikh should stand by and see a wrong perpetrated. A Sikh should give his life to prevent it. His advice, therefore to the Sikhs also was that whatever might have been the use of the sword

in Sikh history, in this age of atom bomb, there was no weapon like non-violent resistance. It did not make cowards of man. It infused courage even in the women. If he recommended non-violence, it was because he was convinced that it was the weapon the really brave.”²⁵

Thus he insulted the sacred Sikh symbol, kirpan, by calling it a rustic and outdated weapon. When a few Sikhs under his influence gave up the kirpan, he made a show of them in public to encourage others to apostate. On January 6, 1947, when he was touring enough villages in Bengal, he told an audience of his prayer meeting:—

“You might here ask that there was a: least no reason for the Sikhs to accompany me. They have not been posted by the Government. Let me inform you that they have obtained the permission of the Government for going with me. They have not come here to create quarrels. In testimony, the Sikhs have come here without their usual kirpans. The Sikhs have come to render service to both the communities impartially. The first lesson which the Netaji taught to the soldiers of his Indian National Army was that Hindus, Musalmans, Christians, Parsis and others should all regard India as their common mother land, and they should all substantiate their unity by working for her jointly. The Sikhs here wish to serve both the communities under my guidance. How – on what grounds - can I send away such friends? They have been giving me valuable assistance and that not for making a public show thereof, but in a spirit of genuine service. If I refused that service, I should fall in my own estimate and prove myself a coward. I request you, too, to trust these people and to regard them as your brethren and accept their services. They are capable of rendering much help and have plenty of experience of this kind of work. God had blessed them with physical strength and also faith.

“If I find that I have said about the Sikhs was incorrect, they would go back.”²⁶

Similarly, addressing his prayer meeting at Delhi, he said, “After that came Sikhs from Hazara. They did not seem to wear kirpans.” He continued his crusade against Kirpan, by advancing various arguments at different times, sometimes inconsistent with each other. He said:—

“Years ago, I said at Nankana Saheb “Sikhs have given proof of their martial valour but the consummation of Guru Gobind’s ideal will be reached only when they will substitute for their kirpan the sword of the spirit or non-violence. So long as one wants to retain one’s sword, one has not attained complete fearlessness. No power on earth can subjugate you when you are armed with the sword of ahimsa. It enables both the victor and the vanquished.”²⁷

When he was questioned as to whether it was breach of ahimsa to use sword in self-defence, he contradicted his previous assertion saying “Even Wavell, Auchinleck, or Hitler does not use the sword without necessity. But that does not make it ahimsa. It is himsa, whatever its justification.”

He tried not only to deprive the Sikhs of their religious symbol, Kirpan by persuasion but also by compulsion. British Government in India had imposed a ban on the wearing of kirpan by the Sikhs. A strong agitation followed and the Government had to withdraw these restrictions. Even Privy Council, the highest court, upheld this right of the Sikhs to wear kirpan as a religious symbol, Gandhi ji continued pleading for a ban. “As to kirpans”, Gandhi ji observed, “whilst there

was for a short time a ban on the carrying of them beyond a certain size,” during the ban he was approached by many Sikh friends to use his influence for the removal of the ban the prescription of a particular size. They quoted a judgement of Privy Council, which was given some years ago, ruling that the kirpan could be carried by any Sikh without any limitation as to size. The speaker (Gandhi) had not studied the judgement. He understood that the judges interpreted the word kirpan to mean sword of any size. The then Punjab Government met the judgement of the Privy Council by declaring that it was open to anyone to possess a sword. And so, in the Punjab, any citizen could carry a sword of any size he liked.

Gandhi stated that he had no sympathy for the Sikhs or the Punjab Government. Some Sikh friends had approached him texts from the Granth Saheb in favour of the speaker’s view that the kirpan was never meant to be a weapon or to be used any how. A Sikh who carried out the injunction of the Granth Saheb could use the kirpan on rare occasions on train of having to defend innocent women and children, the old and the infirm against heavy odds. It was for that reason that one Sikh was supposed to be equal to one and a quarter lakh opponents. Therefore, a Sikh who was given to drinking and indulged in other vices, forfeited the right to carry a kirpan as a religious symbol of purity and restraint, which is meant to be used only in the strictly prescribed manner.

He was of the opinion that it was idle, even harmful, to invoke the aid of past judgement of the Privy Council in order to justify licence. We had just got out of what he had described as a state of bondage. It was wholly improper in a state of liberty to break up healthy restraints under which alone a society could grow. He would request the Sikh friends, therefore, not to sully the great Sikh religion by using the kirpan in favour of any questionable conduct or behaviour. Let them not unmake what was made by arrays of martyrs of whose bravery the whole humanity was proud.²⁷

However, Gandhi failed in his mission of depriving the Sikhs of their religious symbol which has continued as essential external feature of their faith, i.e., kirpan. Kirpan is as sacred to the Sikhs as the sacred thread to the Hindus. Sikhs gave him a good rebuff for this irresponsible utterances and he became very unpopular among the Sikhs.

1. Quoted in Three Phases of India’s Struggle For Freedom by Dr. R.C. Majumdar at P-8.
2. Sikhs do not believe in the divine origin of the Vedas. According to Sikh Gurus, the Vedas, their metaphysical expositions, the Shastras and the Codes of Law, the Smritis none of them is eternal and thus inerrant. Says Guru ji:—

“The Vedas talk of controversial things by which neither peace of mind is attained nor the world is realised.” (Maru M: 3)

3. Even today. Gandhi’s chief disciple, Vinobha Bhave, who enjoys the active support and patronage of the Government for propagating his Sarvodya ideals, is in fact a Hindu missionary propagating Hindu religion. A few years back when he visited Sirsa, author of this book, approached him for his autograph. He declined saying he gives his autograph only on the first page of his book ‘Gita Parvachan’ which is a commentary on Hindu scripture ‘Gita’. The author offered to purchase any book on Sarvodya to have his autograph over it but he insisted that he will sign only over “Gita Parvachan.” This clearly shows that he is more interested in propagating Hindu religious thought than Sarvodya ideals which he ostensibly professes to propagate.
4. He continued his effort to finish the separate identity of Sikhism. He again declared:—

“I personally do not see any difference between Sikhism and Hinduism. They are varieties of the same faith. When I read the Granth Saheb written in Devnagri characters I did not have much difficulty in following the language. The thought in the various bhajans of Nanak Saheb and other Sikh Gurus is derived from the Puranas. But at the same time, I do not mind if the Sikhs regard themselves as distinct from the Hindus. Thus regarded, I admit that their’s is a desolate condition. The remedy, no doubt is in their own hands.”

(Mahatma — Vol 8 — Page 33)

Again he said:—

“It was wrong to make a difference between Sikhs and Hindus. Master Tara Singh had compared the Hindus and Sikhs to the nail and the nail bed. No one, could separate the two. I am glad to hear it. Who was Guru Nanak, if not a Hindu? The Guru Granth Saheb is full of teachings of the Vedas. Hinduism is like a mighty ocean, which receives and absorbs all religious truths.” (Mahatma — Vol 8 — Page 213)

5. After independence, when constitution of India was passed Sikh representatives including S. Hukam Singh, former speaker of the Lok Sabha and now governor of Rajasthan, refused to append their signatures there on as the constitution failed to meet the Sikh demands.
6. Mahatma — Vol II — P 37.
7. Mahatma — Vol 3. — P 95.
8. Mahatma — Vol 3. — P 103.
9. The way to Communal Harmony — M.K.Gandhi — Page 135.
10. The way to Communal Harmony — M.K.Gandhi — Page 135.
11. Ibid.
12. Disorders Enquiry Committee (Calcutta 1920), Vol 1, 2 Quoting Irving Miles, Deputy Commissioner Amritsar.
13. Mahatma — Vol . — P 258.
14. Massacre at Amritsar by Rupert Furneaux.
15. Mahatma — Vol . 1 — P 262.
16. Mahatma — Vol .1 — P 262.
17. Mahatma — Vol . 1 — P 263.
18. He surrendered it later to express his support for the Khilafat movement.
19. Mahatma — Vol .1 — P 263-64.
20. Mahatma — Vol .4 — P 301.
21. Mahatma by D.G. Tendulkar Vol 1, Page 4.
22. Mahatma — Vol .8 — P 4-5.
23. Mahatma — Vol .8 — P 106-7.
24. Mahatma — Vol .8 — P 34.
25. Mahatma — Vol .7 — P 408.
26. Mahatma — Vol .7 — P 300-301.
27. Mahatma — Vol .8 — P 195.

PARTITION RIOTS AND AFTER

Gandhi ji soon realised that he lost the confidence of the Sikhs due to his anti-Sikh policies. He, therefore, launched a mischievous campaign to malign the Sikhs. Sikhs voiced a protest against Gandhi ji's unguarded speeches. S. Sant Singh Lyallpur urged Gandhi ji to present the Sikh case in proper perspective and to refrain from defaming the Sikhs. But Gandhi ji soon realising that Sikhs had lost all faith in his leadership became more forthright in denunciation. He told his prayer meeting:

“It is well to consider at this stage a long letter from S. Sant Singh of Lyallpur, former M.L.A. He has put up a forcible defence for the Sikhs. He has read into my prayer speech of last Wednesday a meaning which the words do not bear and certainly never meant by me. Perhaps the good Sardar is aware of my intimate connection with the Sikhs ever since my return from South Africa in 1915. There was a time, when my word was law to the Sikhs as to Hindus and the Muslims. Manners have changed with the time, but I know that I have not. The Sardar perhaps does not view the present tendency among the Sikhs as I, their avowed dispassionate friend, without any axe of my own to grind can and do. I speak freely and frankly, because I am their true friend. And I am bold to say that many a time the Sikh situation was saved because they in general, chose to follow my advice. I need, therefore, no reminder that I should be cautious about the Sikhs or any other community. Let the Sardar and every Sikh who wishes well of them and is not carried by the prevailing current, help in ridding the great and brave community from madness, drunkenness and all the vices that flow from it. Let them sheathe the sword which they have flourished and have used badly. Let them not be fooled by the Privy Council judgement, if it means that the kirpan is a sword of any length. A kirpan ceases to be sacred when it goes into the hands of unprincipled drunkard or when it is used any-how. A sacred thing has to be used on sacred and lawful occasions. A kirpan is undoubtedly a symbol of strength, which adorns its possessor, only if he exercises amazing restraint over himself and uses it against enormous odds against himself.”¹

As if Gandhi ji was not satisfied by calling Sikhs mad, wine bubbling and unprincipled people, he with the air of an erudite scholar of Sikhs history and religion condemned Sikhs as a menace to India. Continuing his speech, he said:—

“Sardar will pardon me when I say that I have fairly studied the history of the Sikhs and I have drunk deep of the essence of the Granth Saheb. Tested by the tenets of that scripture, what is said to have been done by the Sikhs, is indefensible and suicidal. Sikh bravery and integrity must not be frittered away on any account. It can be an asset to the whole of India. In my opinion, it is a menace which it should not be.”²

Gandhi ji seized every opportunity to publicly defame the Sikhs. He criticised them for petty lapses on ground of etiquette. He was unsparing of the behaviour pattern even of the women folk. His fetish for cleanliness was just an excuse to prove that he bore it hard with the Sikhs. On November 29, 1947, addressing the Sikh congregation at Delhi on the occasion of Guru Nanak's birthday, he remarked:—

“I fear that I might not be able to say to you all that I was to. I had also hoped that you having gone through the military machine would observe perfect silence. But the discipline has not reached the sisters and therefore they are not able to observe the laws of a public meeting. I had the same experience when, some years ago, I was in Amritsar. You will admit that the fault lies with the men. As I entered the meeting place, I saw the remains of the bananas and oranges thrown about any how. These have not only made the place dirty, but dangerous to walk. We should learn to keep the roads and footpaths as clean as the floors of the houses. In the absence of proper receptacles, I have noticed disciplined people putting these in a piece of paper and then temporarily in their pockets until they are cast in their places. It is the duty of men if they have learnt the rules of social conduct, to teach them to the womenfolk.”³

Responsibility for much of the acute suffering that the poor Punjabis had to undergo at the time of partition of India might squarely be laid on Gandhi ji's shoulders. When Sikhs grew apprehensive about their future and demanded solid safeguards to ensure the security of their person, property and religion, Gandhi ji pacified them by meretricious promises, holding out meaningless false assurance. He largely left them unorganised and unprepared to meet the preplanned and well organised waves of attack from the Muslims. In 1947, when Gandhi ji visited Panja Sahib, an address which stressed the sufferings and anguish of the Sikh community and the dangers that faced them and their shrines in Pakistan, was presented to him. Twice, the Gurdwara Panja Sahib, had been attacked by the Muslim mobs but the Sikhs had warded it off. So the Sikhs requested Gandhi ji for concrete measures to help to ensure the sanctity of the Gurdwaras. They also wanted East Punjab to be made into a Sikh state where Sikh religion and culture could prosper.

Creation of such a state would have not only avoided the scale massacre which followed the partition of India but might have also helped in pursuance of the objective of cordial relations between India and Pakistan. But Gandhi ji who was suspicious about the Sikhs opposed the move and thus cast away a great opportunity. His support of the demand might have spared India carnage and perhaps partition and would have brought into existence an India geographically bigger and economically much stronger. But Gandhi replying to the address said that he did not consider it possible that East Punjab should be handed over entirely to the Sikhs to govern. He said that the Sikhs should never entertain such an unworthy ambition. They were reputed to be a war-like race. With them, merit and merit alone, should be the sole test for elevation to any of repute or service.

As regards the protection of Sikh's life and shrines in Pakistan, Gandhi ji said:—

“I want you to shed all fear about the future. I would ask you to rely upon the plighted word of Muslim leaders. Muslims have got their Pakistan. They have no quarrel now with any one in India at least they should have none. If your fears materialize and any attempt at desecration of the Gurdwaras is made by the Muslims, it will be contrary to the tradition of as I know it. And those Muslims who take part in such desecration would be partakers in the destruction of Islam. Every faith is on its trial in India. God is the infallible judge and the world which is his creation will judge Muslim leaders not according to their pledges and promises, but according to the deeds of these leaders and their followers.”⁴

No doubt Muslims had started conciliatory propaganda about their attitude towards the Sikhs but their intention was that of games men who are careful not to disturb the birds they plan to shoot. Shocking barbarities were perpetrated by the Muslims upon the Sikhs. Sikhs were singled out and were set upon with fury which amazed even the British and other un-involved visitors. General Sir Frank Masservy, who was then G.O.C.-in-C northern command, has described the events as he saw them from the Rawalpindi HQ. and in tours of the rural areas and his account brings out vividly this sudden phenomenon of strong anti-Sikh feeling in a predominantly Muslim countryside. He writes:—

“The main attack if you can call it that, took place on a night — I think 7 March when unfortunately I had a sort of ‘coming out’ party for my daughter, in command house. There had been little warning, though some preliminary rioting had led us to have the British battalion in Pindi at a short notice. It was a concerted attack and very widespread throughout the rural areas which suggested that it had been planned, and made it very difficult to deal with — entirely different from the normal communal riots in large cities. I flew in a small plane low over villages in the Pindi district where there was a mixture of Muslim and Sikh population. It was a horrible sight. You could see corpses laid out in the fields just outside a village, like rabbits after a shoot. As many reliable people said, the attacks seemed almost entirely anti-Sikh. I remember one of my staff, a G-2, who went down to Pindi station to get a ticket on a warrant coming back very white faced to say that while he was at the ticket office he had felt a weight against his back, and turned to find it was a Sikh stabbed in the back and dead, but not a soul would say they had seen anybody doing it. Also, I remember an Officer’s wife arriving by train. The train had been stopped outside Chak Lala and she heard shrieks and groans (the time was just about dawn). She lowered a shutter, and looked out, to find Sikhs being dragged out of the carriages and hacked to pieces by the side of the line. She was horrified and screamed whereupon, one of the band came up to her carriage and said “Don’t be frightened. Mem Sahib, nobody will harm you we have just got this job to do, and then the train will go on.”

Sikhs were mocked at by both, the Muslims as well as Hindus, for being less virile than they were considered to be. So ultimately Sikhs acted in self-defence and even satiated their vengeance on the Muslims of India, being moved by the Muslim’s brutality against millions of Sikhs in Pakistan, who were compelled to migrate to India.

Gandhi ji instead of laying it at the door of the Muslims for unleashing unprecedented communal rioting, started a crusade upon the Sikhs by defaming them in public. He said: —
“I am free to admit that the mischief commenced in Pakistan, but the Hindus and the Sikhs of East Punjab and the neighbouring districts have not been behind in copying the mischief. The difference is that the Hindus have not shown the courage of the Sikhs, who know how to use the sword.”⁶

In his daily prayer meetings Gandhi ji started narrating freshly got up stories about Sikh’s attacks on Muslims. For example on November 24, 1947, he said:—

“Take the latest tragedy that happened in the heart of the capital city yesterday. Some Hindu and Sikh refugees are reported to have gone out to an empty Muslims residence and unlawfully attempted to occupy it. A scuffle ensued and some were injured although not fatally. And this incident was exaggerated out of all proportion. The report was that four

Sikhs were murdered. The sequel was to be expected. Retribution followed, and several stabbings took place. A new technique seems to have been adopted now. Sikhs with their drawn swords, which seem to have taken the place of little kirpans, with or without the Hindus, visit Muslim houses and demand evacuation. This demonstrates state of things in this capital city, if the report is true. If it is untrue, it may be dismissed.”⁷

As Gandhi ji’s speeches were given publicity in the international press, he should have been more guarded and cautious about what he said but instead he allowed rumours and gossip of irresponsible people to grow unhindered by referring to them in his prayer meetings. He described Sikhs as wine bibblers and terrorists as is clear from his following utterance:—

“In another part of the city a fresh attempt was being made to force the Muslim occupants out of their places, so as to make room for the Hindu and Sikh Refugees. The technique was that the Sikhs brandished their swords and frightened the Muslim residents threatening dire vengeance, if they did not vacate their homes. He was also informed that the Sikhs were given to drinking with the results which could easily be surmised. They dance with the naked swords to the terror of the passers by. And he was further told that, whereas in Chandni Chowk it was the custom for Muslims not to sell kababs or other flesh foods in that vicinity, the Sikhs and also probably other refugees freely sold these forbidden goods in Chandni Chowk, much to the annoyance of the Hindus in that locality.”⁸

What did Gandhi ji do for the Sikh refugees from Pakistan? He wanted them to be confined to and spread over the East Punjab as if the remaining India did not belong to them. When a deputation of Sikhs from Hazara approached him to have facilities for farming, Gandhi ji’s question was “Why don’t you go to East Punjab?”⁹

Gandhi ji’s utterances made him unpopular among Sikh masses who often refused to listen to him. This is evident from the following speech:—

“Today, Bawa Bachitter Singh Saheb came to me in the morning and insisted that I should attend the Guru Nanak’s Birthday celebration. He told me that probably over a lakh of men and women had assembled there, and that most of them would be sufferers from western Pakistan. I hesitated because I felt that many Sikhs had been displeased with me. Bawa Bachitter Singh Saheb never the less insisted and said that I would say my say before the meeting. I yielded and felt that even as a mother often gives bitter pills to her children, I would take the liberty of saying things which might appear to be bitter. In reality and in effect, they are meant for your good. My mother often used to administer bitter drugs, but I could not feel elsewhere the comfort that her lap promised for me. I have said these things as your sincere friend and servant.”¹⁰

On December 24, 1947, Gandhi ji told his prayer meeting that some Sikh friends had been coming to see him and he had seen too some newspaper cuttings. There seemed to be a general impression that he had of late become an enemy of the Sikhs. They would have not have not have worried much about that, but for the fact that his word seemed to carry weight with the world outside India. The world thought that India had won her independence through non-violence, and if it was so, it was a unique thing in history. How he wished it was really so. But he had already confessed that it was not. Continuing, Gandhi ji remarked that he could but laugh at the anger of Sikh friends. They attributed to him numerous things that he had never said. He made no

distinction between the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims. He had criticized the Sikhs for their drinking habit and for the atrocities that they were reported to have committed. But that did not mean that all the Sikhs had acted in a wrong manner. Nor did it mean that the Hindus could be absolved. The Sikhs being a virile race, he certainly expected more of them. He had freely acknowledged their merits, if he had pointed out their faults. Those who tried to minimize or overlook cruel deeds done, were the enemies of the Sikhs. Whatever he had said, he had said as a staunch friend of the Sikhs. He was not unaware of the lofty teachings of the Granth Saheb. The Sikh friends should never fear that they would be misjudged by the world because of what he had said.”¹¹

Gandhi ji before partition had told the Congress workers who had come to see him off at Lahore railway station, “The real test is coming soon. For myself I have decided to spend the rest of my life in Pakistan, may be in East Bengal or West Punjab. My present place is in Noakhali and I would go there even if I have to die. But I soon as I am free from Noakhali, I would come to the Punjab.”¹²

But when Punjab was on fire due to communal riots, Gandhi ji instead of touring through Punjab, started a fast against the Sikhs in Delhi. He said:—

“My fast is against no one party or group or individual exclusively, and yet it excludes no body. It is addressed to the conscience of all, even the majority community in the other dominion. If all or any one of the groups fully responds, I know that the miracle will surely be achieved. For instance, if the Sikhs respond to my appeal as one man, I shall be wholly satisfied. I shall go and live in their midst in the Punjab for the Sikhs are a brave people and I know that they can set an example in the non-violence of the brave which will serve as object lesson to all the rest.”¹³

It would have been possible for Gandhi ji and his followers to avert the catastrophe in the Punjab. Sh. V.P. Menon had made a suggestion to the Viceroy that Jinnah should be approached and persuaded to declare Nankana Sahib, the great Sikh shrine in western Punjab, a Vatican of Sikhs. It was a gesture which might have had a claiming effect upon the highly strong Sikhs, and one which would have cost Jinnah little to concede. The Viceroy and his staff were well aware of what Nankana Sahib meant to the Sikhs. On 27th July, they had received a report which said:—

“Information from a reliable source has been received that if Nankana Sahib, about twelve miles north of Lahore, is not included in the Boundary Award to East Punjab, the Sikhs intend to act on or about 7th August, and during the ten days before this, large meetings will be held no work up agitation.”

Sir Evan Jenkins, Governor of Punjab, urged the Viceroy to go even further. He asked him to contact the political leaders immediately and ask them to make concessions at once, without waiting for the boundary award. Nehru and Patel would, for instance, be persuaded to say publicly that they were waiving their claim to Lahore. It would be by no means an expensive gesture for it was almost certain that Lahore would be awarded to Pakistan, but to concede it before hand would create the maximum goodwill. He asked Mountbatten to approach Jinnah for an important concession too (For declaring Nankana Sahib as Vatican). There is evidence that Mountbatten did approach Nehru and Patel, chief lieutenants of Gandhi ji in this connection but they refused to make such a move. Had they approached Jinnah, writes Leonard Morley, “it is most likely that he would have conceded Vatican status for Nankana Sahib to show his magnanimity.” This shows the indifference of Congress

leaders to the sentiments of the Sikhs. Master Tara Singh had rightly observed earlier “Whatever is decided in Delhi, will leave my people like no man’s children in no man’s land.”

1. Mahatma — Vol. 8 — Page 195.
2. Mahatma — Vol. 8 — Page 200.
3. Mahatma — Vol. 8 — Page 206.
4. Mahatma — Vol. 8 — Page 70.
5. Pakistan - Ian Stephens — Page 177.
6. Mahatma — Vol. 8 — Page 207.
7. Mahatma — Vol. 8 — Page 199.
8. Mahatma — Vol. 8 — Page 194.
9. Mahatma — Vol. 8 — Page 201.
10. Mahatma — Vol. 8 — Page 206.
11. Mahatma — Vol. 8 — Page 221.
12. Mahatma — Vol. 8 — Page 70.
13. Mahatma — Vol. 8 — Page 251.

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